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No 7

Hectic Fever

by

Dich H Eggleston

of Virginia

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Hectic Fever

This disease is most commonly connected with Pulmonary Consumption, though other causes sometimes produce it. Whatever greatly irritates the system may excite Hectic Fever. Formerly it was believed by many, and Cullen was of the number, and is even now maintained by some, that the Fever is occasioned by the absorption of pus: but Hunter has shewn that this opinion is not valid, and many facts concur to prove that copious absorption of matter may take place without Hectic Fever, and many cases of Hectic Fever occur unattended by an absorption of pus. In the absorption of matter from bubboes and other abcesses, in the former, we have examples, which are not followed by symptoms of Hectic, and in the latter we have instances in those cases of Scrofulous joints in which Hectic

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Fever precedes suppuration, an occurrence by no means uncommon.

Besides Pulmonary Consumption, Hectic Fever accompanies other diseases:

1: It is to be met with, in what are called White Swellings of the joints, and also in Gout and Rheumatism:

2: It is found in Schirrous & Scrofulous affections and Ulcers in every part of the body, particularly in the Glandular structure, as the Mamma, the Ovaries, Uterus, Liver &c:

3: It attends congestion & obstruction of the Viscera, where there is neither abscess, nor ulceration:

4: It occurs, in cases of simple irritation, as where there is a Stone in the Bladder, or Gall duct, or even where inflammation has resulted from swallowing pins or needles:

5: It sometimes takes place in pregnancy, merely from the irritation to the general system, occasioned by the gravid Uterus and its contents.

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Symptoms. This disease partakes of the type and general nature of Intermittent Fever. The ex=acerbations occur twice in the day; the first about noon, which is inconsiderable, and soon suffers a remission; the other in the evening, which grad=ually increases until after midnight: it would, perhaps, be more correct in me to point out the different circumstances, which distinguish Hectic from Intermittent Fever, than, to attempt a mi=nute detail or enumeration of symptoms ascribed to the former disease, by the various authors who have written on it: the two cases, have indeed so many points of similarity, that they may sometimes be readi=ly confounded; and it is not only of importance to a Practitioner of Medicine, that they should be discrimi=nated, but constantly born in mind:

1: The paroxysm of Hectic Fever is rarely regular for any number of days in succession, but after a short time comes on without any established order at al=most every hour of the day and night.

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2. The paroxysm of Hectic, is often not preceded by a chill, and frequently severe rigors are experienced without any hot or sweating stage:

3. The paroxysm of Hectic is not (always) relieved by perspiration, as chills and flushes continue though the discharge by the skin may be copious:

4. The paroxysm of Hectic in the hot stage is invariably attended by a circumscribed flush on the cheek:

5. The tongue in the commencement of Hectic Fever is uniformly clean and florid, and sometimes preternaturally polished; but in Intermittents it is invariably loaded with fur at first, white, & often of a bilious hue:

6. The appetite and powers of digestion continue for the most part unimpaired in Hectic Fever, sometimes increased, & the bowels for the most part in a natural condition; but in Intermittents there are generally gastric uneasiness, loss of appetite, and most frequently constipation of the bowels:

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7: The Urine in Hectic Fever is turbid during the paroxysm, and pellucid as water in the interval, whereas directly the reverse happens in Intermittents:
8: The mind of the patient in Hectic Fever is proverbially cheerful; while in Intermittents, the reverse obtains.

It would be easy to point out other circumstances, in which the two diseases differ; but those I have mentioned are the most prominent and sufficient to form an accurate diagnosis.

Treatment. As regards the management, Hectic Fever does not less resemble Intermittent, both in the general principles and in particular remedies.
The treatment naturally divides itself into two parts; that which is calculated to shorten or remove the paroxysm; and that which is suited to the intermission or Apyrexia.

Of the means of prevention Opium is confessedly the most efficacious: the concurrent testimony of a large number of practitioners is in its favour; but on account of the great and increasing debility in Hectic

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Fever, we do not follow it up with warm beverages, and other means adapted to produce perspiration. On the same account we should withhold those means in the subsequent part of the paroxysm, & should permit the hot & sweating stages to pass off with little active treat=ment. — But in the absence of the paroxysm we pursue a different course. — We here employ all those remedies which are recurred to in Intermittents: but among these there is a choice, and I shall mention such as merit, ~~merit~~ most strongly our attention: Hectic Fever, is either inflammatory or otherwise: when there is too much action as is apt to be the case, in the early stage, the system should always be reduced before tonics are exhibited. Most generally Venesection is indicated, and the blood when drawn under such circumstances always presents the appearance of inflammation. Nor will a single bleeding answer; on the contrary, in most instances, the operation should be frequently repeated, though moderate quantities of blood should always be drawn off at a time.

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The alimentary canal not being oppressed with accumulations of bile, nor in any respect implicated in Hectic Fever, evacuations from it are not particularly demanded. Yet I cannot but believe, so far as my slender observation can influence me, that in some cases, Emetics may be given with utility; they do not act as Evacuants, but by making a new & salutary impression on the system generally, through the medium of the stomach. It may be advanced as a rule, to which there is probably not a single exception, that all diseases of a periodical nature, or which observe the paroxysmal type are essentially benefitted by this class of medicines — or in other words by active vomiting.

The system of the patient being now reduced by antiphlogistic measures we may safely resort to Tonics: of these not the least celebrated is the Peruvian bark; it was the favorite remedy of Cullen who spoke of its efficacy without reservation, But though supported by his high authority and that

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of many other respectable practitioners, yet, from the celebrity of those opposed to the Peruvian bark, I am induced to confess that my confidence in it, is not very high: it will prove offensive to the Stomach, run off by the bowels, & will scarcely ever suspend the paroxysm; Still, when we recollect, how sceptical Cullen was in the virtues of medicines, and how sparing in his praise of them, I would not wish that the remedy should fall entirely into discredit.
Some have found it beneficial to combine bark with Myrrh: but correct experience has taught that Myrrh will answer better when exhibited alone, or differently combined. A celebrated prescription (called Griffitts mixture, from a practitioner of England) employed much in Hectic Fever and especially when it accompanies Pulmonary Consumption is the following -- ℞. Take of Myrrh ℥ij

Sulphat of Iron ℥j

Carbonat of Potash ℥j

Loaf Sugar -- ℥ij - & Water ℥vj. The dose

is a Table spoonful every 1, 2 or 3 hours; as such mixtures are generally given. Many of the vegetable bitters as Chamomile, Quassia, Gentian, Columbo are better suited to this disease than the Peruvian bark. Serpentaria and Wild Cherry Tree Bark, however do more good than any others of this class: the latter is very beneficial: Dr. Chapman speaks very highly in its favour, observing that, besides its tonic quality, it possesses an anodyne property, which is of great benefit: very many medical gentlemen concur with the Doctor, in the opinion which he has advanced of the value of our medicine. Within the last four or five years the Uva Ursi has been employed, in this case, it was originally introduced by Dr. Bourne a Professor in the University of Oxford in England. It has been tried in this City and not without some utility.

It may be supposed that Arsenic which is so valuable a remedy in Intermittent Fevers has not been neglected in the disease which occupies my attention It has been largely prescribed, and if we credit the

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attestations of respectable Physicians, with considerable advantage. In the few cases in which I have known Arsenic used, I was disappointed in its effects, and am therefore not disposed to speak in high terms of it.

Of late the Saccharum Saturni has not been a little commended in Hectic Fever: it is spoken of, by Dr. Irvine of Charleston, as being a very valuable remedy; in the cases, in which it has been used in this City, it has proved unsuccessful, but, perhaps it should not be abandoned without further and more numerous experiments.

The Mineral Acids have been employed in this disease: of their utility there can be no doubt; the Nitric Acid is incontestably the most useful. Combined with the liberal use of Opium, it is certainly the most efficacious remedy, which can be administered in Hectic Fever. The proper method of administration, is to give as much Nitric Acid as can be conveniently taken during the day, and every

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might at bed time to prescribe a dose of Opium & another just anterior to the paroxysm:— as Hectic Fever is a disease purely of irritation it might be conjectured that Opium would be serviceable and practice fully confirms the supposition.

But, though the method mentioned above is perhaps the best, yet there are a few remedies remaining of too great importance to be overlooked. The powers of Sulphur, over all diseases of the paroxysmal type, are now very generally acknowledged. It is the opinion more particularly of Dr Physick, that it affords perhaps the best means of remedying Hectic Fever. Notwithstanding Dr Chapman does not estimate the medicine quite so highly, still he feels prepared to pronounce favorably of it: it must be used in doses too small to purge.

In the course of the last summer Dr Chapman had opportunities of trying the Spider's Web in a number of cases in his practice, as well as in consultation with Dr Physick, with manifest advantage, he says,

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that it possesses a narcotic property, and where Opium does not agree from idiosyncracy &c, he feels persuaded it will be found a very useful remedy.

The last remedy I shall mention is Charcoal. From the great efficacy of this article in Intermittents, it was supposed that it would be useful in Hectic, and accordingly it has been tried, and the success was such as to induce me, to place considerable confidence in the remedy.

Little however will all these medicines accomplish unless the patient is placed in a large or freely ventilated apartment. It is not easy to conceive by those who have not experienced the effect of free ventilation, how important it is to attend to this circumstance. A Hectic has been speedily removed by placing the patient in a room where the air circulated freely, when remedies had been employed in vain.

Exercise is very important, and riding on horseback, when practicable, should be preferred.

As stated such is the management of Hectic Fever,

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excited by causes which the surgeon cannot remove. But when the source of irritation may be entirely done away by an operation, or partially removed by those local applications, which have a tendency to calm it, these should be resorted to; but to pursue the subject further, would require a more lengthy disquisition, than I am prepared to enter into, and would appear entirely irrelative to my present purpose. Finis.